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SUBJECT: ROK REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES: NEAPSM AND NORTH KOREAN  
REFUGEE POLICY

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 30, POL M/C met with MOFAT Director General for the Korean Peninsula Peace Regime Bureau, Huh Chul, to discuss regional issues including a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism (NEAPSM) and North Korean refugee policy. On NEAPSM, DG Huh said there had been very limited progress on the issue since the last Working Group meeting held in Moscow in August 2007. As a way to get the dialogue started, Huh suggested identifying an issue, based on consensus, where progress could be achieved to pave the way for other areas of cooperation. On North Korean refugees, Huh said that the ROKG had considered the option of bringing refugees to South Korea and then determining their preference for resettlement either to the ROK or a third country, especially the United States, but ultimately deemed this plan as "not feasible" given a number of legal and practical constraints. Huh said that he hoped the U.S. would find a way to reduce the time needed to process U.S.-bound cases, because it was clear that North Korean refugees were discouraged from choosing the U.S. as an option by the lengthy process time required. Huh estimated that the number of North Korean refugees may decline in the next year or two.  
END SUMMARY.

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LIMITED PROGRESS ON NEAPSM  
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¶2. (C) In an April 30 meeting with POL M/C, MOFAT Director General for the Korean Peninsula Peace Regime Bureau Huh Chul said that the Russia was "not engaged" as the Chair of the Northeast Asia Peace and Security (NEAPSM) Working Group under the Six-Party Talks. Although Russia had distributed a paper on "guiding principles," this was only after the ROK provided Russia with an initial draft that got the ball rolling. DG Huh said that he was expecting input from the U.S. on the draft principles, noting that the ROK could better prepare its stance on the issue after consulting with U.S.

13. (C) DG Huh said that NEAPSM and a peace regime for the Korean Peninsula were separate, but related, issues. Discussion of a peace regime should involve the "main players" of the Six-Party Talks and should reinforce the talks, but not be linked to the talks. According to Huh, peace regime defines a state whereas NEAPSM defines behavior.

The two are related but different. Huh said that NEAPSM could include many forms of generic behavior and look at political, social and human rights issues. Issues relating to energy cooperation might be best left for a future time once the Energy and Economic Cooperation Working Group (EECWG) had completed its mission to avoid any confusion with the Working Group's efforts to assist North Korea.

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POSSIBLE FIRST STEP FOR NEAPSM  
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14. (C) DH Huh offered the suggestion that the related parties could begin a serious discussion about NEAPSM by focusing on a specific issue such as joint search and rescue efforts and then move on to tougher issues. If all of the parties agreed to work on a common issue, such as search and rescue, it could provide an "early success" on which the group could then build upon and extend into other areas of cooperation. Huh also expressed his hope that the NEAPSM Working Group would be able to meet again, either before or after the next plenary session of the Six-Party Talks.

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NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES  
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15. (C) In his role as DG for Korean Peace Regime, Huh is also responsible for policy toward North Korean refugees outside of the ROK. Following the inauguration of President Lee Myung-bak, DG Huh said that MOFAT had led an in-depth discussion on the refugee issue with all concerned agencies in the ROK. At the root of the discussion was how the ROK could better assist North Korean refugees and reduce the time they spent in third countries waiting to be resettled to the ROK. Huh said the ROK recognized that an increasing number of North Korean refugees were leaving Korea to look for resettlement in other countries, particularly in Europe. According to Huh, many of these individuals made the choice to come to the ROK as the quickest means to get out of the extremely poor conditions of the foreign immigration detention centers (IDCs) but never intended to remain permanently in Korea.

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ROK CANNOT BE A WAITING PLACE FOR ALL CASES  
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16. (C) One alternative that the ROK considered was bringing all North Korean defectors to the ROK and then asking the refugee to make a decision on where he or she wanted to permanently settle. Huh said that this idea was "not feasible" given a number of legal and practical considerations. The amount of time that a refugee would have to wait while a third country made a determination of whether to accept the applicant or not could become a lengthy and protracted situation. There was also no guarantee that the third country would accept the refugee's application. What would the ROK do in the case the refugee was refused admission in another country? Given that all North Koreans are potential South Korean citizens, there could be serious legal issues if individuals were in limbo for long periods of time and it was not clear if they were subject to the protections afforded under the ROK constitution.

17. (C) DG Huh suggested that the best way forward for the U.S. was to find ways to shorten its processing time for North Korean cases. By addressing this issue, many of the other problems would go away, Huh said. He offered the ROK's continued support for these cases and said they would be willing to consider the option of providing transportation letters for North Koreans bound for the U.S. in an effort to

expedite their departure from a third country by transiting Korea. POL M/C thanked the DG for the ROK,s ongoing support for U.S.-bound cases and agreed that the U.S. should look for ways to shorten the processing time of its cases. Still, simply shortening the processing time for the U.S. cases was not the only issue that needed to be addressed. Washington remained concerned that there were many more North Korean refugees in the region who wanted to resettle in the U.S. than the current numbers reflect. This and other issues could be discussed at the next bilateral consultation that is typically held every six months, POL M/C said. Huh said he would like to schedule a refugee bilateral soon.

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POSSIBLE DECREASE IN NUMBERS  
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18. (C) Huh said that he had looked at all of the data about North Korean refugee flows and came to the conclusion that the number of refugees has probably already peaked or will peak this year. Despite what many people believe, the food situation in North Korea is not the main contributing factor compelling North Koreans to leave their country, according to Huh. The more relevant factor is the popularity of North Koreans to migrate from China to other countries in the region where they ultimately seek resettlement to the ROK. As word spreads among the refugee communities in China and elsewhere that life for a refugee in the ROK is not an easy one, and that the ROKG resettlement subsidy has declined, Huh said he estimated the numbers will drop in coming years.

VERSHBOW